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PAGE 01 STATE 035013
ORIGIN INR-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSM-03 SS-15
IO-13 CIAE-00 /074 R

DRAFTED BY INR/RNA/NE:AAVACCARO:DLM

APPROVED BY INR/RNA:PHSTODDARD

SSM:CWKONTOS

DESIRED DISTRIBUTION

SSM

-----100078 100347Z /14

P 092304Z FEB 78

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

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S E C R E T STATE 035013

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SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 035013

TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 498 - FEBRUARY 9, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING

PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY

OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

SECRET/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

1. LEBANON. THERE IS AN INCREASING DANGER THAT THE CLASHES ON TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY BETWEEN LEBANESE AND SYRIAN TROOPS COULD LEAD TO A DETERIORATION OF THE SECURITY SITUATION IN BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON. AT A MINIMUM, TENSION HAS RISEN CONSIDERABLY, AND WE CANNOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT FURTHER INCIDENTS COULD DEVELOP INTO A WIDER FLARE-UP.

2. YESTERDAY'S CLASHES BEGAN IN THE MORNING, WHEN SYRIAN TROOPS, SUPPORTED BY TANKS, SURROUNDED THE LEBANESE ARMY BARRACKS IN BEIRUT'S FAYYADIYAH SUBURB AND STARTED FIRING, ACCORDING TO LEBANESE ARMY SOURCES. HEAVY FIGHTING ENSUED FOR SEVERAL HOURS. THE SYRIAN ACTION WAS AN APPARENT ATTEMPT TO TEACH THE LEBANESE A LESSON FOR

THEIR IMPETUOUSNESS IN PROVOKING THE SHOOTOUT ON TUESDAY, DURING WHICH SYRIAN TROOPS WERE BESTED.

3. IN ANOTHER RETALIATORY MOVE LAST NIGHT, SYRIAN FORCES TRIED TO STORM THE EAST BEIRUT HEADQUARTERS OF SHAMOUN'S NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY; FIVE SYRIANS AND ONE SHAMOUNIST WERE KILLED, REUTER REPORTED. THESE INCIDENTS SPILLED OVER INTO OTHER SECTION OF THE CITY. CHRISTIAN

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 035013

MILITIAMEN AND SYRIAN SOLDIERS EXCHANGED FIRE IN THE AYN RUMMANEH AND SINK EL-FIL AREAS OF EAST BEIRUT, AND THERE WAS SNIPER FIRE ELSEWHERE.

4. THE LEBANESE AND SYRIAN GOVERNMENTS CONTINUE TO TRY TO CALM THE SITUATION. THE LEBANESE CABINET MET LAST NIGHT TO DISCUSS WAYS OF ENDING THE FIGHTING, AND A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY HAS BEEN SET UP. GOVERNMENT LEADERS ALSO HAVE CONTACTED PROMINENT CHRISTIANS TO URGE RESTRAINT. SARKIS CONTACTED ASSAD YESTERDAY, AND ASSAD STATED TO THE PRESS THAT HE WAS COOPERATING WITH THE LEBANESE IN AN EFFORT TO CALM THE SITUATION, ADDING THAT "WE MUST NOT GIVE SUCH INCIDENTS MORE ATTENTION THAN IS WARRANTED."

5. WHETHER THE LID CAN BE PUT ON, HOWEVER, REMAINS PROBLEMATICAL. THE PAST RECORD INDICATES THAT INCIDENTS CAN QUICKLY GENERATE MORE VIOLENT ACTIONS BY THE VARIOUS FACTIONS; THESE ELEMENTS ALREADY SEEM TO BE ANTICIPATING RENEWED FIGHTING ON A LARGER SCALE. ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE, LEBANESE MUSLIMS SEEM TO HAVE STAYED OUT OF THE VIOLENCE YESTERDAY. THE PALESTINIANS ALSO ARE SITTING OUT THE CLASHES. FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST; REPORTS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT ARE UNFOUNDED, ALTHOUGH THEY MAY MOVE TO REINFORCE THEIR POSITIONS IN AND NEAR THE REFUGEE CAMPS. UNLESS THE CAMPS THEMSELVES OR OTHER PALESTINIAN INTERESTS ARE DIRECTLY THREATENED, THERE IS A GOOD

CHANCE THAT THE PALESTINIANS WILL REMAIN ON THE SIDELINES.

6. INDEED, THE PALESTINIANS ARE PROBABLY PLEASED TO SEE THE CHRISTIANS AND SYRIANS--WHO WERE ALLIED AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS DURING THE CIVIL WAR--FIGHTING EACH OTHER. SUCH CLASHES DEFLECT ATTENTION FROM PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES, PARTICULARLY IN THE SOUTH, AND THE PALESTINIANS MIGHT HOPE THAT IT COULD LEAD THE SYRIANS TO WANT TO COOPERATE MORE CLOSELY WITH THE PLO IN LEBANON AS A MEANS

SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 035013

OF COUNTERING THE CHRISTIANS. MOREOVER, THE PALESTINIANS, IN THE WAKE OF DISCONTENT AMONG THE MUSLIMS THAT AROSE DURING THE CLASHES IN SIDON IN LATE JANUARY, SEEM TO BE

TRYING TO ADOPT A LOWER PROFILE.

7. INTERESTINGLY, ANTI-PALESTINIAN SENTIMENT AMONG BOTH MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN LEBANESE, COUPLED WITH THE GROWING ANTIPATHY TOWARD THE SYRIANS, COULD GIVE SOME INDIRECT IMPETUS TO SARKIS' EFFORTS AT NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS TOLD EMBASSY BEIRUT THAT SARKIS HAS BEGUN A SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH BOTH MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN LEADERS. HE IMPLIED THAT THE ANTI-PALESTINIAN REACTION AMONG MUSLIMS IN SIDON OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONVINCE THE CHRISTIANS THAT EVEN THE MUSLIMS ARE TIRED OF PALESTINIAN EXCESSES. SIMILARLY, THE SYRIAN ACTIONS YESTERDAY COULD SERVE TO FOSTER MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN COOPERATION IN LIGHT OF THEIR GROWING MUTUAL ANTIPATHY TOWARD THE SYRIAN PRESENCE.

8. IDF SOURCES, MEANWHILE, HAVE DENIED TO EMBASSY TEL AVIV PRESS REPORTS THAT ISRAELI TROOPS HAD MOVED INTO THE SOUTHERN LEBANESE TOWN OF YARUN ON MONDAY. THEY SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THERE HAD BEEN A SMALL VOLUME OF FIGHTING IN THE AREA AND THAT AN IDF BORDER POST HAD EXCHANGED FIRE WITH UNSPECIFIED "TERRORISTS" NEAR YARUN ON FEBRUARY 6. (SECRET)

9. ISRAEL. ASSESSING THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS ON THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS, EMBASSY TEL AVIV PINPOINTED THREE BASIC REASONS FOR ISRAEL WANTING TO RETAIN THEM:

(A) A GENERAL IDEOLOGICAL RELUCTANCE TO ABANDON
SECRET

PAGE 05 STATE 035013

ANY SETTLEMENTS;

(B) CONCERN ABOUT THE PRECEDENT IT WOULD SET FOR ABANDONING SETTLEMENTS IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA; AND

(C) SECURITY, WHICH IS PRIMARILY AN ARGUMENT FOR A CORDON SANITAIRE BETWEEN GAZA AND EGYPT.

10. ON THE BROADER SETTLEMENTS QUESTION, MEANWHILE, OTHER SOURCES REPORT THAT THE ISRAELI CABINET'S EFFORTS TO PUT A DAMPER ON THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING SHILOH BY APPROVING IT ONLY AS AN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE WILL NOT EASE THE GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMA OVER THE SETTLEMENTS ISSUE FOR LONG. GUSH EMUNIM MILITANTS AND OTHER PROSETTLEMENT GROUPS ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE THEIR PRESSURE ON BEGIN IN A FURTHER ATTEMPT TO RESTRICT HIS FLEXIBILITY IN THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.

11. BEGIN MAY HAVE BELIEVED THAT A COMPROMISE THAT WOULD ALLOW GUSH SETTLERS TO REMAIN AT SHILOH WAS NECESSARY TO PLACATE HARD-LINERS WITHIN HIS COALITION, AND THAT HE WILL NOW BE ABLE TO HOLD THE LINE AGAINST FURTHER PRESSURE TO ACCELERATE SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY ELSEWHERE ON THE WEST BANK. SHORT OF INVOKING HIS FULL AUTHORITY, HOWEVER, HIS ABILITY TO CONTROL GUSH MILITANTS IS OPEN TO DOUBT. GUSH SETTLEMENT LEADER HANNAN PORAT HAS IN FACT SIGNALED THAT THE GUSH EMUNIM MAY NO LONGER ABIDE BY ITS UNDERSTANDING WITH BEGIN TO RESTRICT ITS SETTLEMENTS ON THE WEST BANK TO MILITARY CAMPS AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES.

12. GUSH LEADERS HAVE AMPLY DEMONSTRATED THEIR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT POLICY THROUGH NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY CABINET MINISTERS, WHOSE SUPPORT IS VITAL TO BEGIN. AGRICULTURE MINISTER SHARON, MOREOVER, IS ESPECIALLY CLOSE TO THE GUSH EMUNIM AND HAS EMERGED AS AN INCREASINGLY INFLUENTIAL SPOKESMAN FOR THE SETTLEMENT
SECRET

PAGE 06 STATE 035013

CAUSE.

13. BECAUSE OF HIS POSITION AS CHAIRMAN OF THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON SETTLEMENTS AND HIS MILITARY CREDENTIALS, SHARON'S VIEWS ON SECURITY MATTERS RELATED TO THE SETTLEMENTS CARRY CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT WITHIN THE CABINET AND WITH BEGIN. SHARON HAS SOUGHT TO USE THIS INFLUENCE TO PUT A HIGHLY RIGID INTERPRETATION ON BEGIN'S PEACE PLAN.

14. SHARON IS A PARTICULARLY STAUNCH ADVOCATE OF RETAINING ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI AS A BUFFER ZONE BETWEEN EGYPT AND THE GAZA STRIP, WHICH WAS A STAGING GROUND FOR TERRORIST ATTACKS ON ISRAEL IN THE PAST. HE ALSO BELIEVES THE SETTLEMENTS WOULD SERVE AS A VALUABLE SAFEGUARD AGAINST EGYPTIAN ENCROACHMENT ON ANY DEMILITARIZED ZONE ESTABLISHED IN THE EASTERN SINAI UNDER AN EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI PEACE AGREEMENT.

15. BECAUSE THE SETTLEMENTS ISSUE HAS SUCH PROFOUND EMOTIONAL, SECURITY, AND POLITICAL IMPORTANCE FOR SIGNIFICANT PORTIONS OF ISRAELI SOCIETY, SHARON HAS A READY-MADE ISSUE WITH WHICH TO MAKE HIS INFLUENCE FELT. THUS, THE CREDIBLE THREAT THAT SHARON MIGHT BOLT THE CABINET AND BECOME A RALLYING POINT OF RIGHTIST OPPOSITION TO BEGIN'S PEACE PLAN SERVES AS ONE OF SEVERAL CHECKS ON THE PRIME MINISTER'S READINESS TO MODERATE HIS POSITION ON THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS OR HIS PROPOSAL FOR THE WEST BANK.

16. BEGIN IS ALSO BEING PRESSED TO HOLD FAST BY A VARIETY OF OTHER PROSETTLEMENT GROUPS THAT MAY BE BEGINNING TO COALESCE. SETTLEMENT GROUPS AFFILIATED WITH THE
SECRET

PAGE 07 STATE 035013

LABOR PARTY ARE PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT ESTABLISHING A PRECEDENT FOR THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AND THE WEST BANK IF BEGIN ACCEDES TO SADAT'S DEMAND THAT THE SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI BE REMOVED. ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN UNWILLING THUS FAR TO COOPERATE WITH THE GUSH EMUNIM, SOME LABOR PARTY MEMBERS OF THE KNESSET RECENTLY JOINED WITH SEVERAL LIKUD DEPUTIES AND ONE NRP DEPUTY TO FORM A PARLIAMENTARY GROUP OPPOSED TO GIVING UP ANY SETTLEMENTS.

17. BEGIN IS STILL HAVING DIFFICULTY IMPOSING PARTY DISCIPLINE ON SOME ERRANT HERUT DEPUTIES WHO HAVE OPPOSED HIS PEACE PLAN FROM THE START. THE LAAM FACTION OF LIKUD, MOREOVER, CAME OUT LAST WEEK IN FAVOR OF RETAINING ALL ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI AND IN OPPOSITION TO FURTHER CONCESSIONS TO EGYPT.

18. EVEN THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE, THE MOST MODERATE PARTY IN BEGIN'S COALITION, APPEARS SPLIT OVER WHETHER TO OPPOSE FURTHER SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY. THE PARTY'S CENTRAL COUNCIL RECENTLY PASSED A RESOLUTION BY A SURPRISINGLY NARROW MARGIN OPPOSING SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY THAT "COULD HARM PEACE NEGOTIATIONS."

19. THESE DEVELOPMENTS AND THE LACK OF ANY SIGNIFICANT COUNTERVAILING DOMESTIC PRESSURES SEEM LIKELY TO REINFORCE BEGIN'S OWN RELUCTANCE TO MODERATE HIS NEGOTIATING POSITION. (CONFIDENTIAL)

20. SYRIA. PRESIDENT ASSAD HAS ACCEPTED A SOVIET INVITATION TO VISIT MOSCOW NEXT WEEK, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS CITING OFFICIAL SYRIAN SOURCES. A SOURCE OF OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE IN DAMASCUS REPORTS THAT ASSAD ALSO WOULD LIKE TO VISIT EAST GERMANY, HUNGARY, AND POLAND.

21. ASSAD MAY BE IN THE SOVIET UNION AT THE SAME TIME

AS LIBYA'S NUMBER-TWO LEADER, MAJOR ABD AL-SALAM JALLUD,

SECRET

PAGE 08 STATE 035013

WHO ALSO PLANS TO VISIT MOSCOW NEXT WEEK. THE TWO MEN
ARE LIKELY TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE LIBYAN FINANCING OF FURTHER
SOVIET ARMS DELIVERIES TO SYRIA. (CONFIDENTIAL/NOFORN) VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 26 sep 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION, MONITORING FACILITIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE035013
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: INR/RNA/NE:AAVACCARO:DLM
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 XGDS-2
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D780062-0159
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197802120/baaafbul.tel
Line Count: 282
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 549cb5cf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN INR
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3475253
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INTSUM 498 - FEBRUARY 9, 1978
TAGS: PINR, MARR, EG, IS
To: SINAI INFO ABU DHABI MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/549cb5cf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014